

EDITOR'S MISCELLANY



FROM A NURSE'S POINT OF VIEW.—The Boston *Evening Transcript* of June 3 contains the following:

"To the Editor of the Transcript:

"Last week there was held in this city a meeting in the interest of the education of nurses, which was attended by many eminent and praiseworthy people.

"In the course of the meeting a statement was made to the effect that a large number of the women who entered training-schools were of commonplace or inferior intelligence, and were drawn to the life chiefly by the desire to earn big money.

"I desire to emphatically refute this statement. I think I am qualified to do so because, in the first place, I am a nurse—one of the women criticised. I hold two diplomas from Boston hospitals, one for a full course and one for a post-graduate course, and I have intimately known the personnel of the schools of other hospitals in this and other cities by virtue of having done post-graduate and special work therein. Therefore it is clear that I have had large opportunity to know what sort of women enter the nursing profession.

"In the second place, I am of old Knickerbocker stock. My father and grandfather and great-grandfather were gentlemen and scholars, members of the clerical and medical professions; so I think it may be admitted that I have a sufficient standard of breeding by which to judge my fellow-workers.

"To begin with, I frankly admit that there are commonplace nurses, just as there are commonplace physicians and commonplace men and women in *la haute société* or in any other walk of life that you may mention.

"To say, however, that the majority of professional nurses are commonplace is to show a lack of intelligent knowledge of the matter in hand.

"It is well to remember that we are Americans.

"There are a great many women in this country who possess in a marked degree intelligence, ability, and character, who through accident of circumstances were not born into the traditions of culture and gentle manners. Through no fault of their own they must acquire, by dint of effort, the knowledge and customs that have been part of the daily growth in life of the more favored.

"There are many of these women in the nursing profession. They are women whom I delight to honor. They are the women of whom

Dr. Weir Mitchell has said: 'The American woman has wonderful powers of self-development.'

"Give them a little more than half a chance and their intelligence and right instincts will appropriate all that is best in life; and they will bear testimony to the inherent worth of human character.

"Besides these women of whom I speak there are in the nursing profession many others who were born to the best things, and by the best things I do not mean wealth or social position, but that atmosphere of scholarly refinement which, superadded to character, gives the touch of grace without which our social structure would be sadly incomplete.

"Some of the finest women I have ever known I have met in the training-schools.

"Where did they come from?"

"They came from little towns in Maine and on the Cape, from towns over the Canadian border, from the cities of the South and West, and from the Atlantic seaboard. They were worthy descendants of loyalist and Puritan, Quaker and pioneer, and Southern gentlemen.

"In this day of advanced curricula it seems as if every thoughtful person must realize that a woman of inferior intelligence could not win through a good training-school.

"To successfully study bacteriology, biology, hygiene, therapeutics, dietetics, and household economics requires no mean order of intelligence.

"The only schools in which I have met women who may justly be called inferior and commonplace are the small schools attached to private hospitals and the schools whose course is numbered in months instead of years.

"The woman with a touch of vulgarity about her will choose to study in a private hospital from a mistaken notion that she will increase her own prestige by nursing only people of the better class; and the woman who cares more for the money than the work will always be tempted by the shorter course.

"When State registration shall have been accomplished, these schools will be brought up to the standard, and then the public will have closed one gateway by which inferior women may now enter the nursing profession and the homes of the people.

"But do not the nurses think a great deal about the money they earn?"

"They certainly mean to earn their living by their professions. So do the physicians, and no one thinks the less of them for that; for they also mean to restore their patients to health. Men who hold positions of civic trust earn their living thereby, but that fact does not prevent their being faithful citizens.

"I think part of the difficulty arises because we are women. Everyone expects a man to earn his living and respects him for doing so. With women it is different. We have not been at it very long, not more than two generations; and it is not unnatural that the thoughts of others, and perhaps our own, should dwell upon the matter rather disproportionately. I have known nurses who, it seemed to me, thought too much of the money side of the question—though, perhaps, it would be more true to say that they expressed their thoughts with want of good taste. At the same time I have known well that these were good, true women, faithful and devoted in their work, and ready to place the patient's interest above their own when the two interests conflict, as they sometimes will.

"This matter will adjust itself if we are allowed time. We ask you, good people, to give us time and to give us of your honor and confidence.

"It is perfectly true that, try as we will, we cannot do our best for those who distrust and criticise us, though they be in high place. It is equally true that all our best responds when we are honored and trusted, albeit by the poor and lowly.

"J. B. S."

THE OCCUPATION OF NURSING.—The Boston *Medical and Surgical Journal* of March 30 says:

"On Friday of this week a conference is to be held in this city to consider the question of forming an association of those interested and actively engaged in advancing the cause of nursing. It is hoped that through the formation of such an association more uniform methods of training, higher standards of education, more effective coöperation between the medical profession and nursing, and more serviceable relations between nurses and those needing their services may be brought about. It is announced that Dr. R. C. Cabot will deliver an address upon 'The Possible Uses and Benefits of the Proposed Association.' A long list of representative names, headed by President C. W. Eliot, is appended to the circular which announces the aims of the meeting.

"If this meeting fulfils even a part of the object which it has set itself, of fundamentally improving the art of nursing, it will have justified the efforts of its promoters. The tendency of the past few years has been towards greater coöperation among nurses and completer organization. With this has naturally come an increasing sense of the dignity of the calling, until it is now insisted in some quarters that nursing must hereafter be termed a profession. Whatever our personal opinion may be regarding the justification for this change of attitude, we are convinced that whatever tends to improve nursing as an art is to be encouraged, and whatever, on the other hand, tends to obscure this

element should meet with the warmest condemnation. It is a matter of small consequence whether a body of women band themselves together as a profession or under some humbler title, provided they do not lose sight of the object for which they exist, namely, simple nursing of the sick.

"Just in so far as the organization which meets this week insists upon this practical matter as the corner-stone of its work, it will be of benefit. If it can succeed in still further impressing upon nurses the extraordinary difficulty of the calling they have chosen and the high qualities of mind and character demanded for its successful accomplishment, it will be welcomed and encouraged by the medical profession. If, however, and here we see a positive danger, the main issue is lost sight of in organization and theory and insistence on more training when more training is not needed, we cannot see in it a source of progress. What physicians wish is good nurses, and if nursing is to be a profession, it must supply good nurses. If this can be better done by organization, no one can possibly object; if organization tends towards a neglect of the individual patient, let us return to the simpler methods. These are matters for the nurses themselves to decide.

"The problem is a simple one to state. How are we to secure trustworthy, tactful, sufficiently trained nurses? How is the physician to be protected, and to protect his patient against bad temper, lack of judgment, carelessness, and tactlessness, or worse, on the part of the nurse? Are we to expect from the nurses' organization a censorship which will reduce to a minimum the possibility of entrance to their calling of women unfitted by education and temperament for the exacting work which it entails? or are these fundamentals to be forgotten in the broader questions which now seem to be pushing towards the front? If our doubts grow insistent at times, it is not without reason. Nursing is drudgery, and, so far as we can see, always will be. If the drudgery can be lightened, so much the better, but women undertaking nursing should fully appreciate the facts as they are before they have injured both themselves and their calling by failure when the actual test comes. The modern nurse is often sufficiently well trained in the mechanical part of her art when she falls lamentably short of the qualities which render her possible in a sick-room. What we need is tact, and willingness to work, and common-sense, perhaps difficult qualities to instil, but none the less essential. We trust if the association to which we have alluded is formed, that it will give a share of its attention to these prosaic matters, and recognize the pitfalls into which it may easily fall under the present policy of expansion."

[While we may not altogether agree with this writer, we must admit that some of his observations contain a considerable degree of common-sense.—ED.]